

Testimony on HB 4420
October 5, 2005

My name is Jim Paparella and I am the executive director of Child & Family Services, Capital Area – a private, Lansing based human service and child welfare agency.

I am here today to strongly protest the proposed change to the Child Protection Law as it applies to when a child abuse or neglect investigation can be conducted by the Department of Human Services in coordination with law enforcement agencies. Amending the definition of "severe physical injury" from its current language, "...or any other severe physical injury that seriously impairs the health or physical well being of a child" to that which only "threatens the life of a child" is inherently dangerous.

Restricting DHS and law enforcement coordinated investigations to only "life threatening" conditions will undermine a "best practice" that exists in communities where there is a commitment to conduct thorough and accurate investigations of child abuse and neglect. This practice is called the Children's Assessment Center, or CAC. There are twelve CAC's in the state of Michigan and each CAC utilizes a forensic, team decision making approach in the investigation and interviewing of suspected child victims. This method provides checks and balances in the process and assures validity when substantiating a complaint. In our community, law enforcement professionals are an integral part of the CAC team, which also includes Children's Protective Services, the Prosecuting Attorney's Office, and a trained forensic interviewer.

At a time when we expect and demand qualified people and good investigations of child abuse and neglect, we need to be inclusive, not exclusive. Our children deserve that.

I introduce to you now Jerre Cory, who is the director of Angel House. Angel House is a project of my agency and Angel House is Ingham County's Children's Assessment Center.

Thank you.



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